

I left a couple of Theory syllabi in your mailbox. I'm in the middle of my move (the big day is next Tuesday), and you're also finishing the quarter and getting ready to leave, so I don't know if we'll get together.

I think the Big Ideas that I have from experience are:

1. The students have a considerable range of interest and preparation, including grads from other departments. Increasingly, our seniors are so well prepared that they can do well in the course. I try to allow both first timers who've never worked with theory to get the basics, but also to make it challenging to the theory-types who may have already had a film theory course elsewhere, background in philosophy, etc. The Oxford Guide was reliable and servicable for nonmajors and grads without undergrad film studies background.

2. They ALL have gaps in historical knowledge of film. I'm always astonished how few know what Italian Neorealism is/was and have actually seen and remember *Bicycle Thief*, etc. Being of the generation that checked off what we saw on tv in Sarris because there were no VCRs and DVDs, it's disconcerting to have grad students whose faces are blank when you refer to *The Searchers*, or *Notorious*, or *All that Heaven Allows*. Part of this is that some newly arriving PhDs and MFAs haven't taken our film history sequence yet when the Theory class is offered. Sometimes I've just done a handout the first day and asked them to check off or name various representative films and if they've seen them. Burch's Correction Please has worked very well at giving a kind of mini-history of silent era form and technical changes which also then gives them a real sense of why the early theorists are concerned with many of the issues they address.

3. I've found it very useful for them to have to write up summaries of key basic articles, exchange them with other students, and I try to grade them pretty strictly until I'm sure they can actually accurately represent a theoretical argument. Some of the students have an anxiety about theory (often women and MFAs) and this gives them confidence at the start of the course. Conversely there are the "theory boys" who quote (actually paraphrase) Derrida, Deleuze, etc. A few of these are actually quite smart and knowledgeable, but there are also the ones who really have only read (superficially) a few things in the secondary literature and commentary and who use this to impress/intimidate other students.

4. I find Braudy & Cohen a little more servicable than the Stam & Miller for historical depth and range, but obviously the latter covers third cinema and global issues much better. And I don't think B&C have seen any films after 1970 that weren't nominated for the Academy Awards, and certainly haven't read any theoretical work after 1980. I'd say it's a toss up and you always end up putting additional things on reserve or a course pack.

5. In general, the Anglo-French bias of Film Theory in the US makes it interesting/important to stress the German tradition, and the Soviet 20s. But in 10 weeks....how do you fit in everything? and give them an historical sense of development. Do you lecture a little on Bergson so they understand Deleuze, or give priority to Simmel so they understand Kracauer?

Anyway, hope this helps your own process of planning a great course.

CHUCK

